

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, April 15, 2016

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Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. RIDE, Office of Postsecondary Commissioner resolve matter concerning dual, concurrent enrollment course offerings

Governor Raimondo's Prepare RI initiative, through which Rhode Island students can take courses for both high school and college credit, at no cost to themselves or their families, has been a huge success. We are continuing to expand dual and concurrent course offerings through our partnership with the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and through such avenues as the Advanced Coursework Network, which opened for enrollment last week.

Last month, the Board of Education approved the list of Prepare RI course offerings for the coming school year, based on the joint recommendation of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and RIDE, and we informed you about the approved list through a Field Memo announcement on March 4. We also notified the field, through the Field Memo on March 25, of a series of webinars regarding the updated Prepare RI course list.

Some schools have received a notice from Rhode Island College regarding the approved list of courses RIC would offer in the fall, notifying you that some students may need to change course selections and schedule for the coming school year.

We are pleased to let you know that we have resolved this issue with Rhode Island College. You and your students may leave current 2016-17

Prepare RI course selections in place; no schedule changes are necessary. Any course offered during the 2015-16 school year through the Prepare RI program may continue to be offered during the 2016-17 school year. We will update the 2016-17 list of approved courses, as necessary.

All Prepare RI courses must be of sufficient rigor and must guarantee that students can earn transferable college credits. Rhode Island College has agreed to revise its course offerings to comply with this policy.

Going forward, we recognize that, for the 2017-18 school year, we will need to publish the list of Prepare RI approved courses, including any additions or deletions, at a much earlier date to help students, families, and educators with the process of scheduling and course selection.

I apologize for the worry that this issue may have caused, and I want to thank our partners in the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner for their help in resolving this matter.

2. RIDE looking into administrative delay regarding fees for summer-school courses

You may be aware of a recent Superior Court ruling (Giannini v Council on Elementary and Secondary Education et al.,

C.A. No. PC 2014-5240, March 30) that reverses a decision of the Elementary and Secondary Council and finds, in essence, that school districts may not charge fees for summer-school courses. We are reviewing this ruling and exploring options for a one-year administrative delay in implementation, as summer school is only three months away and your budget and plans are likely finalized for Summer 2016.

3. **LEAs reminded on PARCC guidance**

Thank you for your continued work toward successful administration of PARCC assessments. As a reminder, you can find our complete memo on PARCC assessments, which we distributed last month, here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/RIDEOffices/CommissionersOffice.aspx#34071258-message-to-families-educators-on-parcc-assessments---february-2016>

4. **Schools must close on statewide primary day in September**

Please be aware that RIGL §17-18-15 requires all public schools (with the exception of the Block Island School) to close on both Election Day in November and on the statewide primary day in September. The statewide primary will take place this year on September 13; the election will take place on November 8. We apologize for any inaccuracies in prior guidance on this issue.

5. **Central Elementary (Lincoln) student chosen to be Governor for a Day**

Congratulations to Sophie Alexander, a 5th grader at the Central Elementary School, in Lincoln, winner of Governor Raimondo's Governor for a Day Essay Contest, a Women's History Month initiative. Sophie will get her chance to be the Governor for a Day on Friday, April 22. Sophie's essay is about compassionate leadership, and you can read Sophie's essay here:

<http://www.governor.ri.gov/documents/press/SophiaMiranda.pdf>.

6. **Barrington students win state, national competitions**

A number of Barrington students and teams won statewide and national competitions recently. Last Saturday at the 2016 Rhode Island Science Olympiad, held at Rhode Island College, the Barrington Middle School team won the middle-school division and the Barrington High School team won the high-school division. Both teams will compete in the National Science Olympiad next month in Wisconsin. Last week, in the 10th annual Calc-Bowl math competition at the University of Rhode Island, a team from Barrington High School took first place. And on Tuesday, two Barrington High School students were among the top five scorers at the national LifeSmarts championships on consumer awareness, sponsored by the National Consumers League and held in Denver. Michael Lamontagne placed first in the area of “environment,” and Eli Shea placed first in “consumer rights and responsibilities.” Congratulations to all!

7. Science and Engineering Fair winners named

The Rhode Island Science and Engineering Fair, held earlier this month at the Community College of Rhode Island (Warwick), has selected Denilex Rodriguez, of Times2 Academy (Providence), and Nicolas Berg, of Bishop Hendricken High School, as its top two senior division winners. Denilex and Nicolas will represent Rhode Island at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, in Phoenix, next month. Congratulations to both students!

From RIDE

Finance:

8. RIDE updates calculations of education aid to reflect the March data, posts local aid payment rates for Fiscal Year 2017

As part of the funding-formula law, state education aid is based on data from one year prior to the year in which the state distributes the aid. Therefore, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 aid is based on enrollment and free- or reduced-price lunch data from FY 2016. To fulfill this mandate, we collected data on student enrollments and free- or reduced-price lunch status from the beginning of the current school year through last month. These data are then annualized to reflect a full year. We also adjusted the calculations to account for the results of the charter-public-school lotteries held last month. Remember that the funding formula spreads all changes over the remaining years of the transition: 2 years for those LEAs with an increase in state funding and 5 years for those LEAs with a reduction in state funding. We have forwarded this data to the Governor's Office and to the General Assembly for their consideration. No changes will go into effect until the General Assembly passes, and Governor Raimondo signs, the annual appropriations bill.

In addition, RIDE has posted the FY 2017 local-aid payment rates for students attending charter public schools, the William M. Davies, Jr. Career & Technical High School (Davies), the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met), and the Anchor Learning Academy (Recovery High School).

The updated formula information and local aid payment rates are posted on our website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/FundingSources/StateEducationAid.aspx>

If you have any questions about the aid calculations or local payment rates, please contact Kristen Cole, at 222-4681 or kristen.cole@ride.ri.gov.

Instruction:

9. **Grants available to develop ideas on implementing Civics GSEs**

The Civics GSEs Educator Engagement Grants are envisioned as an opportunity for Rhode Island educators to engage with the Civics GSEs (grade-span expectations) and to creatively think of ways to implement these standards in their classroom.

RIDE is looking for new and innovative ideas for implementation of the Civics GSEs in elementary, civics, history, social studies, or government classrooms through curriculum resources, content-knowledge development, or other innovative projects.

Project teams will consist of teachers and other educators working collaboratively and may include a postsecondary-education or community-organization partner. The total grant pool is \$9,000, with anticipated maximum of 9 grants to be awarded. Local Education Agency educators from all grade levels are encouraged to apply.

The application deadline is **April 27**, with award announcements to be made by April 29. Application information can be found at:

<http://ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/CivicsSocialStudies.aspx>.

Please contact Phyllis Lynch, at Phyllis.lynch@ride.ri.gov, or Kate Schulz, at Kate.Schulz@ride.ri.gov, with questions about these grants.

Evaluations:

10. **Reminder: RIDE offers to schedule SLO/SOO Scoring Calibration workshop for LEAs; to hold workshop for new evaluators on April 29**

RIDE is offering to schedule a workshop on scoring calibration for student learning objectives (SLOs) and student outcome objectives (SOOs). This workshop will be conducted with evaluators as the primary audience, and the workshop will be open to all LEAs. The purpose of this workshop is to assess and increase consistency of SLO/SOO scoring. In the session, participants will use the SLO/SOO scoring maps to determine scoring, using multiple SLO/SOO examples and scenarios. This workshop will help evaluators solidify their ability to score SLOs/SOOs effectively, which can then guide the work they do with teachers and support professionals.

RIDE can work with school or district leadership to co-facilitate a workshop that involves actual SLOs/SOOs.

RIDE will also hold a one-day, voluntary workshop that will focus on end-of-year activities and procedures, as part of the yearly training and support for new evaluators who use the Rhode Island Model. During this session, participants will engage in activities such as calibrating and scoring SLOs/SOOs, calculating final effectiveness ratings, and using evaluation data or the Educator Performance and Support System to inform talent-management decisions. The workshop will take place on Friday, April 29, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at RIDE. Please use the following link to register:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1462>

If you are interested in having a RIDE staff member facilitate a calibration session for evaluators in your LEA or if you have questions about the new-evaluator training on April 29, please contact Alicia Reniere, at alicia.reniere@ride.ri.gov or 222-8178.

From the U.S. Department of Education

11. USED issues letter on use of federal funds to support STEM education

The U.S. Department of Education has issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to states, school districts, schools, and education partners on how to maximize federal funds to support and enhance innovative science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education for all students.

The letter serves as a resource for decreasing the equity and opportunity gaps for historically underserved students in STEM and gives examples of how federal funds—through formula grant programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) and the [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#)—can support efforts to improve instruction and student outcomes in STEM fields.

Outlined in the letter are examples of allowable uses of federal funds that can support the development, implementation, and expansion of STEM experiences to help improve student achievement in the 2016-17 school year. The examples include recommendations for both improving access for students and supporting educators in STEM disciplines, including computer science.

12. Education Secretary King calls for well-rounded education

Yesterday (April 14), Education Secretary King called for a renewed focus on well-rounded education for all students in a speech at the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts ([press release](#), [remarks](#), and [video](#)). “Strong literacy and math skills are surely necessary for success in college, careers, and life – but they just as surely are not sufficient,” he explained. “Being a well-educated person and passionate about

learning isn't just about reading and computing well. It's about being skilled and knowledgeable about a wide range of subjects, expert and passionate about a few, and confident in the quest for more knowledge."

"The good news here is that, with the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), the opportunity to widen how we understand educational excellence is suddenly ripe," he continued. "It's a great chance to right the balance in places where the learning focus has become too narrow, and to do so in ways that expand, not dilute, civil rights. The simple fact is, every student in this country needs and deserves access to the subjects that go into being a well-educated person. Music and art; world languages; physics, chemistry, and biology; social studies, civics, geography, and government; physical education and health; computer science. These aren't luxuries that are nice to have. They're what it means to be ready for today's world."

13. USED offers resources on financial literacy

April is [National Financial Capability Month](#), and the U. S. Department of Education is collaborating with the Treasury Department Financial Literacy and Education Commission (FLEC) to teach students how to save and manage money for their postsecondary education. "The most expensive degree remains the one you don't get," Secretary King stressed at a recent FLEC meeting. He pointed out that the biggest threats against students' ability to manage loan debt are not completing the degree program for which their loan debt was incurred and earning a degree that is not competitive in the 21st century.

To help students make better decisions about higher education, the USED Office of Federal Student Aid has several learning resources:

- the [College Scorecard](#);

- [Responsible Borrowing](#) and [Budgeting](#) videos;
- an early preparation and saving [fact sheet](#); and
- a [workbook](#) to help middle school students think through education goals and how to pay for them.

The [FLEC web page](#) provides additional resources that focus on early college preparation.

14. USED announces upcoming events on college admission, NAEP grade 12, Future Ready summits

On April 26, communities are urged to recognize local students with a [College Signing Day celebration](#).

On April 27, at noon, the National Assessment Governing Board will host a [webinar](#) to discuss results and trends from the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress in 12th-grade reading and math. Register [here](#).

Registration is open for Future Ready [summits and workshops](#) to help school district leaders improve teaching and student learning outcomes through the effective use of technology. The USED has partnered with the Alliance for Excellent Education to offer these free [Future Ready](#) events.

From other organizations

15. Scituate High Taterthon 2016 for grades K-5 invites parents, teachers to participate

Taterthon is a project of the Scituate High School NEED Club intended to help reduce fossil-fuel use by encouraging more children to get involved in growing food, specifically potatoes!

When we buy food from the grocery store, more fossil fuels are used than if we grow it ourselves using organic practices.

How to participate? Go to <http://www.taterthon.org/> and click on "How to Participate." Parents and teachers can sign up to receive participation kits. Kits include a potato, instructions, and a blank notebook. Teachers can request classroom sets. Deadline to sign up is **June 1**. The sooner requests are submitted, the sooner growing can begin. Prizes will be awarded based on the quality of the notebooks, which must be submitted to Scituate High School NEED club by September 30. The school whose students have the greatest participation will receive a prize. Visit the website to learn more.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/FieldMemos.aspx>